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Community to bring in New Year '22 with style

By Brittany Holbrooks
Towns County Herald
Staff Writer

2021 saw change for better and for worse, not just in Blairsville, Hiawassee and Young Harris, but the entire globe.

COVID-19 continues to present some level of threat, though medical technology is keeping hard on the virus' heels. Unfortunately, as a result of the disease, some local businesses have had to close their doors for good.

But there was also an influx of hope as the first steps in returning to normalcy rolled out, with much returning in 2021, including familiar festivals and other events canceled the previous year, allowing

young and old alike to get out of the house and re-enter the world again, so to speak.

On that note, 2022 should be anticipated with optimism. Certainly, Union and Towns counties will be bringing in the New Year on a positive note with plenty of festivity.

Not only will there be classic celebratory fireworks to look forward to New Year's Eve but also good food and other forms of entertainment at a variety of area venues.

One should keep in mind that while these events are happening at different times, they will all be occurring on Dec. 31, so some planning may be required in order to find the experience that fits the needs of the family or an individual. An event with exten-

sive involvement from both counties will be the annual New Year's Eve Fireworks at the Georgia Mountain Fairgrounds, free in Hiawassee. The Blairsville Cruisers will be hosting a car show from 5-7 p.m., and the fireworks are set to go off around 8:45 p.m.

Local vendors will be present with arts and crafts and plenty of food down in the fairgrounds' booths, and folks will be able to enjoy all the displays from the "Mountain Country Christmas in Lights!" extravaganza prior to the start of the fireworks.

Performing live will be Hiawassee-based "Our Way Band," who opened up recently for Foghat and Night Ranger. Incidentally, preparations



Brasstown Valley Resort is once again hosting its regionally renowned New Year's Eve Gala Dec. 31. Pictured here: celebrants dancing just prior to the midnight balloon drop in 2017. Photo/Towns County Herald

Bradshaw to adopt 2022 Proposed Budget on Dec. 30

By Mark Smith
Towns County Herald
Staff Writer

On Tuesday, Dec. 21, Towns County Sole Commissioner Cliff Bradshaw held a public hearing at the courthouse to discuss the 2022 Proposed Budget as submitted by County Finance Director Andrea Anderson.

Bradshaw will adopt next year's budget on Thursday, Dec. 30, at 11 a.m. in the courthouse – just in time for the start of the new fiscal year to run Jan. 1-Dec. 31, 2022.

Other than the commissioner and his staff, no

residents attended the Dec. 21 hearing, which was advertised the week before in the Towns County Herald. So, there were no public comments, questions or objections.

The 2022 Proposed Budget balances to \$12,109,165, which is up from the \$11,265,590 budget for 2021. That is a year-over-year increase of \$843,575, or about 7% higher than the previous year's budget.

Anderson said the larger budget is due to many factors, including "an increase in wages, an increase in the amount that we're charged at the (Transfer Station) plus an increase in traf-



Cliff Bradshaw
Sole Commissioner

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Knox retires from Post Office after 41 years of service



L-R: Fred Maas, Mike Earle, Knox Garrett and Paul Smith on Garrett's last day as an employee of the U.S. Postal Service in Hiawassee last week. Photo by Jeremy Foster

By Jeremy Foster
Towns County Herald
Staff Writer

Shipping mail and packages is crucial to the functioning of society, with people far and wide depending on institutions like the U.S. Postal Service to deliver what they need, where they need it, and all in a timely manner.

Just as crucial are the

people who help make that happen behind the counter, which is why, on Tuesday, Dec. 21, the Hiawassee Post Office and City of Hiawassee decided to honor the retiring of longtime employee and Towns County favorite Knox Garrett.

A Hiawassee native, Garrett worked for the Post Office for 41 years total leading up to his final day on the job last

week. He worked mainly in construction up to the age of 24, when he had a brutal motorcycle accident that took many years to recover from, requiring rehab, knee surgery and hip replacement.

When the time passed from being 100% disabled, Garrett resumed working part

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Sheriff's Office recognizes hard work in Christmas party

By Jeremy Foster
Towns County Herald
Staff Writer

The Towns County Sheriff's Office held its office Christmas party on Dec. 11 in the Charles Suber Banquet Hall at Young Harris College.

From the decorations to the food, it was an amazing event, and TCSO staff members were elated with the kindness from everyone involved, including the deliciousness prepared by the Sodexo kitchen craft food staff and servers who were there to serve about 120 people in celebration.

Several awards were given out to commemorate those who work diligently to serve their community all year long, with a few awards even being handed out to non-Sheriff's Office members of the community. All awards were decided by Sheriff's Office employees themselves.

Several organizations attended to show respect and support for the Sheriff's Office, including Young Harris College Campus Police Department, the Sons of the American Revolution Blue Ridge Mountains Chapter, which gave out the Deputy Award, and the Towns County Sheriff's Auxiliary.

The following individuals received awards that night: Tommy Shook, Sons of the American Revolution Award and Deputy of the Year; Alisa Richards, Citizen of the Year; Jerry Smith, Community Service Award; Vonya Baldwin, Detention Officer of the Year; David Marella, Auxiliary Member of the Year; and Administrative Supervisor Vicki



Sons of American Revolution local Chapter President Jared Ogen presenting a Law Enforcement Commendation Medal to TCSO Sgt. Tommy Shook in the Dec. 11 Sheriff's Office Christmas Party. Shook was also awarded "Deputy of the Year." Photo/Submitted

Ellis, Employee of the Year.

2021 marks Sheriff Ken Henderson's first Christmas with this department, and he was nothing but grateful for everyone who made the evening possible.

"I want to thank Young Harris College, the Sodexo staff, and all of our employees for making this a special event," he said. "I was happy to recognize the great abilities and achievements of everyone that we work with."

"Everyone is wonderful to work with and always willing to help and be there for each other to make all of our jobs run more smoothly. The way we present ourselves to those we work with and to our public is very important to us.

"We have our officers working zones now, and we make sure we are doing our business and church checks. We are not where we want to be yet, but we have reached many goals we have set out to do, and we are going to continue until we get to where we want to be."

"We have made a commitment to our people of Towns County, and we are not going to let them down."

Chief Deputy Gene Moss said that the Christmas party was a great night for the Sheriff's Office, something fun to do at the end of the year for employees who work so hard all year round to protect and serve.

"Our culture is all about

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Club 66 joins others in giving back to community veterans



L-R: Larry Little, Virginia Irene Cornwell and Kathleen Little run Club 66 Veterans and Associates to assist local veterans in any way they can. Photo by Brittany Holbrooks

By Brittany Holbrooks
Towns County Herald
Staff Writer

YOUNG HARRIS – On Friday, Dec. 17, Club 66 Veterans and Associates helped bring Christmas cheer to life by facilitating the delivery of toys to local families in need.

In the past, the BMW

Motorcycle Club of Georgia's annual toy donation went toward the Towns County Sheriff's Office Empty Stocking Fund. But the Sheriff's Office changed gears this year by hosting "Shop With The Sheriff" at Walmart, leaving the donation in search of a new home.

Marine Corps League

Unicoi Detachment #783 Commandant Alton "Doc" Coleman and Toys for Tots Union/Towns Coordinator Wayne Roshaven had heard that Larry and Kathleen Little of Club 66 were looking for new ways to help the families of veterans at Christmastime, so they connected the two organizations.

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TCSO Christmas...from Page 1A



TCSO Sheriff Ken Henderson and Chief Deputy Gene Moss awarded Alisa Richards of the Commissioner's Office with the "Good Citizenship Award" in the 2021 Sheriff's Office Christmas Party.

striving hard to work on and maintain our image. We want to be professional to the public," he said. "We are focused on everything from how our deputies deal with our citizens, to how we dress, to traditional high-visibility black-and-white cars so our public can easily recognize us and not confuse us with any other agency.

"Drugs is one of our biggest problems we are facing, and we are committed to stopping that before it gets worse. It tears families and lives apart, and we are trying to stop the people who are getting others addicted. And we want to help those suffering from the throes of addiction to get solace."

Both Sheriff Hender-

son and Chief Deputy Moss wish the people of Towns County a Merry Christmas and hope it is a safe and wonderful time for all.

People are encouraged to visit the Towns County Sheriff's Office official Facebook page for community updates, and to contact the department for anything they may need.

Photo/Submitted

County Budget...from Page 1A

fic there, plus inflation overall; everything has increased – fuel, propane, everything."

Bradshaw noted that the county has the money to support the increase in the budget while reiterating Anderson's comments in the hearing.

"The budget is increased because we've given raises to employees, and at the (Transfer Station) here, the people that haul our garbage away, they went way up, so we had to increase the budget for that," Bradshaw said. "And then inflation, period."

"Food service at the jail has gone up quite a bit. Diesel fuel is up for the Road Department. Gasoline is up for all the public safety vehicles. And then propane that we heat all the county buildings with is way up."

"So, the county is not immune to inflation (which is close to 7% nationally), just like households aren't. Everything is up, so we had to increase the budget."

As commissioner, Bradshaw said one of his main concerns is making sure that the county has the money to pay for the increased budget.

"And we do," he said. "We have the money and the revenues to cover it. Also, my main concern is we never want to grow the county government or the expenses of the

county government.

"But, in this case, we have no choice because of the actions of the federal government. We hope that it levels off. A lot of the news reports from the White House say it's transitory; in other words (they say) it's a temporary inflation, but we're not banking on that."

"We're very conservative on all the revenues that we estimate to come in. That's why we usually have more (at the end of the year), because we're very conservative on that. And then we try to be very, very accurate (in forecasting) what we think the expenditures will be."

2021 beginning reserves were up \$900,000 over the 2020 fund balance, or county reserve monies, as Bradshaw did not have to use reserves in 2020 due to a combined local spending freeze during the pandemic, better-than-expected tax collections, and federal CARES Act dollars.

Covering expenses in 2022, however, will require the use of reserve funds in the amount of \$779,565. This still leaves a healthy year-end fund balance projected at about \$4.9 million, which is more than a third of the year's budget put back just in case.

Basically, budgeting to provide services in the county, like the Sheriff's Office, Fire

and EMS, involves estimating what revenues will come in over the next year based on what came in the previous year between property, sales and vehicle taxes, grants, fees, interest on deposits, etc.

The same goes for expenses, or expenditures. It is an estimate, or educated guess, of what the county expects to spend next year based on what was spent this year, plus any anticipated capital investments, like a new fire station or dump truck.

That's putting it very simply, but the point is, Bradshaw said he and his staff commit each year to being very conservative in their oversight of county business, as evidenced by Towns having incurred no municipal debt and the property tax rate being near lowest in the state.

Bradshaw said he authorizes across-the-board annual raises of 50 cents per hour for all county employees in an effort to stay competitive and keep county employees from migrating to other, higher paying counties, which impacts the budget by about \$150,000 every year.

But that's one of the costs of maintaining the standard of living that Towns County enjoys, which Bradshaw believes is well worth the investment.

"We watch your dollars as if they were ours," Bradshaw said. "We're very frugal with your money, and we make sure that we get as much out of every dollar as we can."

Club 66...from Page 1A



Members of the Marine Corps League Unicoi Detachment #783 joined the BMW Motorcycle Club of Georgia at Club 66 on Dec. 17 for a big Toys for Tots donation.

Photo by Brittany Holbrooks

"It literally was a community effort between (the BMW group) looking for a veterans' organization and us looking for a way to get more donations out," Kathleen said.

So, on Dec. 17, an organized contingent from the BMW Motorcycle Club pulled into the Club 66 Veterans Thrift Store just past noon to drop off several thousand dollars' worth of toys to be delivered later to local families as part of the Marine Corps League's Toys for Tots initiative.

"Members purchase toys and the club purchases toys as well, and we collect them at (Wooly's Cycles of Atlanta)," said BMW Motorcycle Club Member Ian Feinberg, noting that Wooly's Cycles is a sponsor of their efforts.

In total, the donation resulted in more than four boxes of toys to be loaded up and gifted to underprivileged families of Towns County.

Club 66 has also been able to raise about \$3,500 with help from the public this Christmas season, which will supplement support groups for veterans or go directly to local warriors who need it most.

Of course, Kathleen and Larry Little are no strangers to hospitality.

Much like the Thrift Store, the Club 66 Bar, operated by the couple for eight years, caters to anyone, though veterans are made to feel especially welcome with the combined ambiance of inviting pool tables and dart boards, donated hats and badges, and old black-and-white photos of the most elderly regulars, who

happen to be two World War II veterans.

The goal of Club 66 Veterans and Associates is to assist local veterans in as many ways as possible, thereby magnifying the welcoming aura of the bar and turning it into an all-encompassing, supportive community that provides aid for anything from serious financial trouble to simply offering a shoulder to lean on.

One could say the ingenuity and inclination toward helping others is hereditary. Kathleen's mother, Virginia Irene Cornwell, runs the Club 66 Thrift Store at 2641 Highway 66 in Young Harris, right at the Georgia/North Carolina state line. It is located upstairs from the bar and is the first thing folks see when they turn into the parking lot.

"Mama," as Cornwell is known throughout town, says her thrift store is different from "all the other thrift stores in the world." She set up her shop to "look like a consignment store." Indeed, it is well organized with a variety of stock, but the magic lies in the meaning behind the business.

Cornwell goes the extra mile when it comes to serving her community and frequently gives away much-needed items like backpacks and clothing. Meticulously organized on a highly visible shelf near the door is a selection of mostly canned or boxed food items that are all free, and Cornwell has even been known to prepare fresh meals for those in need.

"We've given checks to the Healing Hands in Blairsville,

money to the Ninth District in Hiawassee, Truett's Children's Home – we donate two or three times a year for them," Cornwell said, producing an extensive list of the organizations the club has helped in 2021.

One of Club 66's greatest accomplishments was raising funds for the interring of unclaimed Vietnam-era veteran cremains at the Georgia National Cemetery in Canton.

During the holidays, Cornwell and the Littles also put together something they call the "Angel Wish Tree," wherein they "adopt" 12 of the tri-state area's most struggling families.

After accepting wish lists written out on index cards, it is up to Cornwell, the Littles, other members of the club, and public donations to make the Christmas dreams of these families come true.

Some organizations may balk at the prospect of helping larger families, but no family is too big for the Angel Wish Tree, now in its third year. With dedication and attention, the club always makes sure everyone gets at least one thing on their list.

Not only was the Angel Wish Tree a success this year, but in addition to the Thrift Store's usual efforts, Club 66 had even more to give – so much so that, according to the Littles, 2021 was their best year of giving yet thanks to the abundance of toy and monetary donations.

For more information on Club 66 and to find out how to get involved, visit the Club 66 Veterans Thrift Store Facebook page or <http://club66bar.com/>.

New Year...from Page 1A

are well underway for the upcoming Jan. 29 "for KING & COUNTRY" Christian concert inside Anderson Music Hall at the fairgrounds.

New Year's Eve food sales will begin at 5:30 p.m., including hot chocolate, hot dogs, barbecue, firepit items and more.

Food and vendor purchases will be the only things that guests will have to pay for at this event; entrance and viewing the car show are free. The big show will feature \$5,000 in fireworks, and while there is no cost of admission, donations are welcome to help defray costs of the event.

This will be a family-friendly affair, so alcohol will be prohibited. Questions should be directed to 706-896-4191.

The Marina Station New Year's Eve Celebration kicks off at 9 p.m. on Dec. 31 in Hiawassee. The party will swing through just past 12:30 a.m. of

Jan. 1, 2022. Guests are encouraged to dress in their best '90s attire and can expect a dance contest and live music by "Natti Love Joys," who have co-billed with Joan Jett, Three Dog Night, The Band, The Clash, The Ramones and more.

Appetizers and drink specials are on the evening's menu. For more information, call 706-896-2262.

Granddaddy Mimm's of Blairsville is hosting a New Year's Eve Party that will surely be a blast with its moonshine toast. Needless to say, guests must be at least 21 to enter. The \$75 per person admission includes access to live music, a photo booth, and even a catered meal.

Due to safety regulations, there is an attendance cap at only 65 guests, so head out early. Festivities will start at 8:30 p.m. and carry on until just after the birth of the 2022

New Year. To find out more, call 706-781-1829.

Young Harris' Brass-town Valley Resort will be holding its annual New Year's Eve Gala with a 2021 theme of "Winter Wonderland." The gourmet dinner buffet for the formal affair will be open from 7:30-9 p.m., with music and dancing straight through to the balloon drop at midnight.

Reservations are required and include a two-night stay. For pricing information and to put in a reservation, call 706-379-9900, but be advised that slots are filling up quickly.

People may also check out New Life Family Church's New Year's Eve service for another family-friendly option. The Blairsville-based gathering will last from 5-7 p.m., and guests will be able to sit down for a meal together afterward. Contact Pastor Don Parmely at 706-781-6142.

Happy New Year's from the North Georgia News and Towns County Herald!

Knox Retires...from Page 1A

time in construction on light duty as a material carrier. To segue into a less physically demanding job, he took the civil service exam to begin working at the Post Office in 1980 at the age of 27.

He worked four hours a week on Saturdays for two years before becoming a part-time flexible employee, gaining 28-30 hours per week before finally leaving construction to be better on his body. He remained in his part-time flex position for 36 years before going full-time.

"The thing I liked most about this job was the people," Garrett said. "I really enjoyed relating to people and getting to know them. I see a lot of the same people every day, and they will tell you what they are going through, and you just form a bond with them."

"I would like to say to all of my customers that I have gotten to know over the years that it has been a true honor to wait on them and give them service. I would always try to give them the best service for their money, even something as little as trying to put their item in a smaller box to make a cheaper rate."

In honor of Garrett's years of service, the City of Hiawassee, Hiawassee PD and

postal patron Fred Maas came to throw a surprise gratitude celebration for the retiring postal employee on his last day of work by awarding him with a pair of commemorative challenge coins.

Sunny Isles, Florida, Retired Police Chief Fred Maas shared his praise for Garrett that day, saying Garrett was one of the first people he met after moving up here part-time from South Florida. Towns County would later become Maas' full-time place of residency.

"I was standing in line, and I watched the way he handled people," Maas said. "He would always try to help them in the best way possible, and he knew everybody by name."

"I said to myself that if the way he treats people is evident of what this town is about with this personal community relationship, then this is where I definitely want to be. He is very reflective of what service to the community means."

Hiawassee Police Chief Paul Smith said he was happy to be able to highlight "someone in our community in a special way."

"Knox really exemplifies public service, and as a public servant myself growing up in

this community and getting to know Knox since I was a little kid – to see him through to the end of his career is just amazing," Smith said.

Hiawassee Postmaster Mike Earle said Garrett will certainly be missed by both the community he has served and his co-workers at the post office.

"Knox embodies what customer service is all about, and he is the same person every day whether good, bad or ugly," Earle said. "If there was a day Knox was not here, every customer that came in would ask where he was or if he was OK."

"He has that gift of making everyone feel welcome, and I would like to say that Knox IS the Hiawassee Post Office. He is cut from a different cloth, and you could never ask for a better employee or person. He treats everyone like his brother or sister, and I simply just love him to death."

Following his last day, Garrett went in for another knee surgery, and he is looking forward to getting some much-deserved rest during his recovery process.

"I am not quite sure what is next for me," Garrett said of retirement. "I enjoy working on my farm and cars, and I may try hunting for the first time in my life, but for now, I am just going to enjoy life and go with the flow."